

EDUCATION AND GENDER EQUALITY AS INDISPENSABLE TOOLS TO BRIDGE THE LACUNA OF CURRICULUM IN NIGERIA

BY

SABA BABA KUDU AND JIMOH KAYODE

KWARA STATE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, ILORIN

ABSTRACT

There is no doubt that education is the foundation of any meaningful development in every society. Education is important for every individual and the society at large just as roots are important to growth and development of a tree. The paper addresses the importance of education and schooling disparity between male and female and causes of the disparity. Since education impacts on every tiling, it should be given to ail. Thus, the paper recommends that all inhabiting, cultural and religious beliefs must be discarded. Specific measure could be taken to eliminate gender disparities in the access to all levels of education. Government should endeavour to improve school environment and retention of girls by allocating appropriate budgetary resources amongst others.

Keywords: *Education, Equality, Instrument, Curriculum*

Introduction

Education is a life-long process through which man's all-round (moral, emotional, physical and intellectual), development is facilitated to be useful to self and the society (Ijaiye and ijaiye cited in Ijaiye and Lawal, 2004). It is a mechanism through which the society generates the knowledge and skills required for its survival and sustenance. It enriches people's understanding about themselves and the world. It improves the quality of their lives and leads to broad social benefits to individuals and society at large (Kazeem and Ige, 2010). Education, according to Osundare (2009) is the supreme light giver, the breezy dawn after a night of suffocating darkness. It clears a path through the jungle and, it is the compass that takes man ashore from the rough and clueless water.

Human capital theory emphasizes education as enhancing the productive capacities of individuals (Almendarez, 2011). It positions education as the bedrock for the development of any nation. This is because it is the driving force behind the socio-economic advancement of nations through production of human capital, who are essential managers of the other capitals of the economy.

Adesina (1985) submitted that:

Education is the tool for integration of individual effectively into a society so that the individual can achieve self-realization, develop national consciousness, promote • unity and strive for social, economic, political, scientific, cultural and technological process(p20i.

When citizens of a country are educated, they would think right, act right and bring about positive attitude for the development of their country and the world at large. This is corroborated by Fahd al Qudah (2006). thus:

If a nation is successful in developing (educating), its people as strong and complete individuals, it will be able to realize a glorious future for itself, promote peace within its boundary and defend her sovereignty. However, if a nation fails to develop (educate), its citizenry and make them deficient in carrying out some of the activities of life effectively, then that nation is doomed to weakness, destruction and obscurity (p4).

Education, therefore, is important to the growth and development of the society because of its power to fashion an individual to be integrated into his society and to become a promoter of his societal culture and development. It is a weapon for acquiring skills, knowledge and competence for survival in a changing world (Ekpo&Ishaq, 2011).

Gender equality refers to the situation which allows women and men to have equal conditions, treatment and opportunities for realizing their full potential, human rights and dignity and contributing to economic socio-cultural and political development. Gender equality is based on women and men being full partners in their home, community and society in general. Education is the key that opens the doors for modernization and globalization which should be given to all citizens without discrimination (Anho, 2010). Therefore, proper education to all citizens without discrimination is the only instrument which can enable the society to fulfill the demands of rapid change needs in the society.

Importance of Education

The importance of education in rapid transformation of the society cannot be over-emphasized. It is through education that citizens acquire the necessary knowledge and skills needed to conceive and implement viable programmes that bring about rapid political and socio-economic development of the society. It is in realization of this, that serious government in the world dedicates a reasonable percentage of their budgetary allocation to the provision of quality education for its citizens. Hence, the United Nations directed utilization of at least 26% of the total budget of a country to the provision of education. Also, the Nigerian vision 20:2020 identifies education as the most crucial instrument for empowering young people (male and female), with knowledge and skills which will in turn make them access to productive employment (Z SPE AC, 2012).

Today, the greatness of any society is judged by its level of educational attainment. The Nigerian National Policy on Education (2004) states that "Not only is education the greatest force that can make for the quick development of its political, economic and human resources. Thus the value

of education in the transformation of the society for self-reliant and development cannot be overemphasized. Federal and State government must make serious investment for the provision of effective and functional education for the citizens.

The essence of education is to create the right relationships not only between the individual but between communities and societies at large. Education is the systematic training of the individual in order to bring about positive changes in his or her behaviour so as to become fulfilled citizen (Adikipe, Eriba&Egwu, 2008).

Education is rightly regarded as one of the social institutions designed to transmit the culture, skills, knowledge, attitude and traditional values of the society to the younger generation because it tells people how to think, talk. Abubakar (2009). views education as the aggregate of all the process by which a child works properly and make decisions intelligently. It is important in our life like other basic needs of human beings. It is a productive and beneficial factor throughout one's life.

Importance of Female Education

It is a clear fact that the education of girl child/women is for the benefits of the family and the entire community, because they are home makers, custodians of the culture and add fundamental values to the society. The change in the society is possible only if women that constitute more than half of the entire community are educated (UNICEF, 2005). There is a global recognition of the education of both male and female, as the popular saying goes "educate a man you educate an individual, but educate a woman, you educate a nation". All nations are striving to educate their citizens both male and female, in order to achieve meaningful and sustainable development.

There is direct relationship between development and education. UNICEF (2001) has documented that women who are educated provide better nutrition for their families and are more effective in taking care of children under their care. This view is also held by Jekayinfa (2006) who stated that educated mother always want their children, both girls and boys to acquire better education than they themselves received. Jekayinfa (2006) further described those who could write and keep records, hold position of authority and participate in several occupational associations or professional development groups as chairperson, director, etc. It is quite true that in many African traditional societies, women may not be the key decision makers either in the home, local or national levels, there are still evidences which indicate that educated women would make a useful contribution to the decision making progress both at home and outside the home.

The educated women are able to negotiate their rights and aware of their responsibilities. UNICEF (2005) indicated that uneducated girls are more at risk than boys to become marginalized. They are more vulnerable to exploitation. They are more likely to contact HIV/AIDS, which spread twice as quickly among uneducated girls than among girls that have even some schooling. That is why education and health issues are topmost discussion all over the world, without a well-equipped hospital and qualitative doctors, there will be no cure for illness.

Causes of Disparity between Male and Female Education

In the past, girls were not encouraged to take up challenging courses like medicine, engineering and others due to misconception that female education ends in the kitchen while boys took Mathematics, Sciences, Accountancy, etc. Girls' enrolment in higher education was at low rate. Francis (2000) further argued that gender differences in education also very obvious when looking at subject choice in school. Girls were more likely to be encouraged into less academically prestigious subjects than boys. In Nigeria, women have not enjoyed equal educational opportunities with men. This is due to many factors such as ethnicity, prejudice, preference and culture that produce the major inequality within the educational system in Nigeria.

UNICEF (2005) observed that if a family can afford school fees for only one child, it will likely be a boy. If someone needs to fetch water or do housework instead of going to school, girl will likely be chosen. If someone needs to stay at home to care for younger siblings or the sick ones in the family, this will most likely be a girl. Girls will also most likely be withdrawn from school early in adolescence as the age of marriage approaches.

From birth until death, gender shapes human feeling, activities and thinking abilities children learn even at the age of three years that their society defines male and female differently. Correls (2001) expressed that gender shapes our interest and beliefs about our own abilities, guiding areas of study and eventually career choices.

Gender Equality and Education in Nigeria

In many parts of the world, there is mostly a focus on the enrolments of girls while it has not engaged boys sufficiently, this resulted in inequality. In Botswana, Lesotho and Namibia (South Africa) some boys would be due to enter school while they become cattle herders, this task was given to them as many adult males who got wage employment elsewhere (USAID, 2008). Similarly, boys in Latin America have lower achievement rates than girls. This is limited to nation's gender empowerment (UNICEF, 2003). The weak performance of the boys is related to their traditional socialization (USAID, 2008). In Jamaica, boys are harassed and told they are lazy and not serious about their studies. This resulted in low self-esteem and poor academic achievement (MSI/EQUATE, 2005).

However, the National Policy on Education (2004).contains gender issues. Section one (4). (c). clearly indicated that there is need for equality of education opportunities to all citizens. Section one (5). (c). also states that: Nigerian Philosophy of Education is based on the provision of equal access to educational opportunities for all citizens of the country at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels.

On the other hand, Nigerian constitution of **1999**, section **18** also stressed on fundamental freedom and human rights. Chapter **11** which deals with fundamental objectives indicated that government shall direct its policies towards ensuring that there re equal and adequate educational opportunities for all at all levels. This shows that there is no document which enforces only male education.

In Nigeria, there are many educational policies on the girl child. These include the National Policy on Gender in Basic education, the Universal Basic Education Policy, Early Child Care Policy and National Gender Policy by Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Mobilization. These efforts are to assist in raising the status of women and get them involved in the development process thereby meeting the challenges of 21st century. This has resulted in the increase m enrolment of the girls and better performances in their academic blueprint. At the same time, under achievement rate of boys is alarming as they are involved in crimes, drug abuse, theft, armed robbery, gambling unhealthy attitude. All of these affect their educational achievement, adversely (UNTCEF. 2003). Boys' academic achievement is becoming a serious problem which needs a policy attention too without diverting the attention from continuing issues of access for girls to primary and secondary education. This does not mean female targeted programmes are no more needed. According to USAID (2008) the primary issue of targeted intervention whether tor girls or for boys is how the activity is designed and executed.

Recommendations

Since education is to liberate individual from ignorance, it should be for even-one. Regardless of his or her gender to address the imbalances in access to education by both males and females in Nigeria, the following recommendations are worth considering:

- i. All inhibiting cultural and religious beliefs and practices must be discarded, while all available channels of communication must be explored to change societal attitude towards women's education
- ii. Specific measure should he taken to eliminate gender disparities in access to all levels of education. This can be done by ensuring that women have equal access to career development, training scholarship and fellowship, etc.
- iii. Government should endeavor to improve on school environment and retention of girls by allocating appropriate budgetary resources and by enlisting the support of parents and the community through value re-orientation ana mass enlightenment campaigns.
- iv. Create a gender sensitive educational system in order to ensure equal education and training opportunities, full and equal participation of females in educational administration and policy and decision making levels.

- v. Institutions of learning needed to develop curriculum and teaching materials, formulate and take positive measures to ensure female students have better access to and participate in technical and scientific education. This should be done especially in areas where they are not represented or under represented at the moment.
- vi. Provide, in collaboration with parents, NGOs, traditional rulers, donor agencies, religious and community leaders, academic and technical training and career planning for women and girl-child.
- vii. Those who are interested in their children's success should be responsible for establishing good schools to provide good education for their dependents. The success of any educational system depends, to a large extent, on the quality, quantity, commitment of government, individuals and those to whom education is being provided.
If all these are considered and implemented with all sincerity it deserves, certainly qualitative and quantitative education will be ensured.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the paper has demonstrated the indispensability of education as a major tool for rapid progress and development of any human society. The National Policy on Education (2004). and the 1999 Nigeria Constitution do not discriminate on gender basis in providing education to the citizens. This is because the boys and girls have equal opportunities to acquire education for effective use for their own betterment and the betterment of the society in general and this should be the essence of education in any given human society.

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